

camp founder continues quest to bring science to kids

ucsf summer science camp

By Janet Wells / Thu Jun 29, 2017



Image credit: Cindy Chew

Heather Hertema, PharmD '10, founder of UCSF Summer Science Camp, returned for the camp's 10th anniversary.

As a first-year UCSF PharmD student, Heather Hertema, PharmD '10, had a big idea: a free summer camp for kids who might not otherwise be exposed to the creative problem-solving and making-things-explode fun of science.

Hertema put together a grant proposal and approached the UCSF School of Pharmacy dean at the time, Mary Ann Koda-Kimble, PharmD, hoping to secure classroom space on campus. She walked out with the green light for space—and a promise of \$10,000 in funding.

“To make that meeting happen and be told, ‘This camp is yours’ had such an impact on me,” says Hertema. Turning her idea into the inaugural UCSF Summer Science Camp meant crafting the curriculum, recruiting campers, securing parental permissions, organizing transportation, and enlisting a cadre of volunteer student counselors and faculty—all while in her first year of professional school.

The experience continues to inspire her every day: “It’s given me the confidence to propose other things that may be beyond my expertise at the moment, and to go beyond my comfort level.”

Back at camp, after 10 years

This week, for the camp's tenth anniversary, Hertema returned—diving right back into action as 44 fifth- and sixth-graders built bottle rockets to launch in the afternoon at Golden Gate Park.

“We started this camp before most of you were born. We hope you’ll consider coming back here to school,” she told them, before asking, “What’s your favorite part of camp so far?”

The first two answers: “Making slime!” “Liquid nitrogen ice cream!”

“It’s really emotional that it’s gone on for so many years and to imagine all the kids who have come through,” says Hertema, who recently connected with two camp alumni who are pursuing science careers. “It’s so valuable for these kids, not only to be here and do science and meet faculty, but to be valued and told, ‘We want you to come back here.’”

Hertema, who was the 2009 student winner of the Chancellor Award for Public Service for being the force behind science camp, credits Jay Levy, MD, as an early and fervent supporter. As the program’s faculty advisor, Levy continues to help recruit colleagues and secure funding.



Image credit: Cindy Chew

Jay Levy, MD (left), chats with Heather Hertema, PharmD. Levy is the UCSF Science Camp faculty advisor.

“It’s amazing—he took this on as his baby,” Hertema says. “To see how all these people have embraced this camp and pushed it forward, it’s so gratifying.”

Still mentoring students in STEM

Now an inpatient pharmacist at Mercy San Juan Medical Center in Carmichael (Sacramento County), Hertema continues volunteering to bring science to underserved students. Through **EnCorps**, a nonprofit that encourages STEM professionals to teach and tutor in high-need communities, Hertema works with high school students at the Aspire Academy in Sacramento.

This summer—paying out of pocket—she is mentoring four of those students in producing resource kits for their school’s science program. “Science lends itself so well to demonstrating and getting kids excited, but teachers don’t always have the time or money to get those resources together,” says Hertema, who also hopes to arrange special tours of Genentech, Google, UCSF, and other institutions to expose the teens to STEM career opportunities.

“I’m working with students who are from very low-income homes, who don’t have a big safety net,” Hertema says. “Whether or not they go into science, people who can apply the critical thinking skills that you learn from science are going to be better off.”

“The trades are a building block for science”

Witnessing the transformation that happens when girls have a mentor in science has inspired the latest of Hertema’s big ideas. “I think the trades are such a great building block for science. To get young girls involved in these activities, what I’d love to do is get a group of girls and, over a summer, take a Volkswagen Beetle and convert it to electric.”

And Hertema has the resume to make it happen. “My mom ran a craft club for 4H, and I hated crafts. By seventh grade I refused. My dad said, ‘Why don’t we overhaul a car engine for your 4H project?’ she recalls. “I brought that engine to the county fair crafts building, and started it up for the judge.”

While she didn’t get “best of show,” she got a blue ribbon, and something far more important: “Rebuilding that engine was one of the most empowering things I ever did. It was something not even the boys could do.”

Source: <http://pharmacy.ucsf.edu/news/2017/06/camp-founder-continues-quest-bring-science-kids>